


SHELLS
AND
RIBBLES

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SHELLS AND PEBBLES.

A Story for Children.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "STORIES FOR THE NURSERY."

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF
THE COMMITTEE OF GENERAL LITERATURE AND EDUCATION,
APPOINTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

LONDON :
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE :

SOLD AT THE DEPOSITORIES :
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SHELLS AND PEBBLES.

CHILDREN who were born, and have lived all their lives, in an inland county, scarcely know what is meant by “the sea.”

Henry Miller was one of these; he was eight years old, and though he had been taken, when quite a baby, to the sea-shore, he could not recollect anything about it.

Now, if you live near the sea, I dare say you may think: “Well, I should not like to live in an inland county, so far away from the sea as never to be able to walk on the beach, or to climb the rocks, or to pick up curious things on the shore. I would not be Henry Miller for the world.”

You will laugh, perhaps, at the way that Henry found out that the sea was salt; but, after all, he may now know some things about it which you do not; and, though he was not many hours on the shore, he may have picked up some curious things which you never saw in your life. Some other things he saw, which, I doubt not, you have seen, but he may have learnt something even about these which you do not know, so that what was told to him may be new to you also.

But if you too, like Henry Miller, live inland, you will be pleased to hear what he saw, though nothing happened to him different from what any little boy may meet with when visiting the sea-side. I am not going to tell you an amusing story, but only to write about things which any one who has eyes, and knows how to use them, may see for himself, and which any one who

wishes to learn may read of in useful books, or find out by asking those who know better than himself.

Henry Miller and his father, then, went last winter to spend two or three days in a town on the south coast of England. The day after they arrived, they walked to some high ground, from which they could see the water. Henry had seen rivers and ponds large enough for ships to sail on, but what now lay before him was very different. A broad sheet of water, shut in on both sides by high land, stretched out so far that nothing could be seen beyond it. Whether the water rose till it met the sky, or the sky came down till it met the water, or whether they met each other half way, he could not make out. This sheet of water, his father told him, was called a bay. There were many ships in it, most of them lying quite still, riding at anchor, that is, each fastened

by strong chains to an iron anchor, which the sailors had thrown over into the water, and which lay fixed by one of its flukes, or large teeth, to the bottom. Some of them had their masts broken, for there had been a dreadful storm a few days before, and they had sailed into this bay for shelter.

In the distance they could see the sails of a tall ship, which was coming in, but, strange to say, not a bit of the ship itself was in sight—it seemed to be quite sunk beneath the surface. Mr. Miller reminded Henry that the earth was round, like the globe in the school-room at home, and that the reason why the hull of the vessel could not be seen was that the round surface of the globe came between it and his eye; but that if he could see through the water between, he would find that the hull of the ship was floating just like the vessels riding at anchor.

A little way from the land was an island, on which some houses were built. The land on which Henry stood was so much higher than the island, that he could see quite over it, and make out, quite well, that it really was a piece of land surrounded by water.

After standing here a short time, and watching the boats, which were sailing to and fro, some with sails, and some moved onwards by oars, they walked down from the high ground by a broad road, and then by some stone steps which had been cut in the rock, until they stood upon the beach.

Though in the middle of winter, it was not very cold. A fresh breeze was blowing towards the shore, which ruffled the surface of the water, making it rise in little waves. A little way out, the waves rose and fell without breaking, but, as they came near the shore, they curled over in long white lines of foam, and chased one another up

the beach, making a dashing noise, which never ceased. Here and there, where rough rocks jutted out into the sea, the waves rose much higher, and dashed over them with such violence, that no one could stand with safety at their edges. Sea-gulls, some nearly white, and others dark grey, were flying about, sometimes dipping into the water, and rising again as if they had stooped to pick up something. Mr. Miller said he supposed they were feeding on bits of meat or fish, which had been thrown over from the ships. In summer, they often fly about in large flocks, darting down in the same way; but then they are generally employed in real fishing, and a large flock marks the place where a shoal of pilchards, or herrings, or sprats, is swimming near the surface. Then, too, they are of great use to the fisherman, who is taught by them where to throw over his nets with the best chance of a

catch. In winter, these fish keep in deep water, so that the gulls, who cannot dive, are obliged to find some other kind of food. There are several different kinds of gulls, but all that were seen to-day were of the same sort, the only difference being that the young birds had darker plumage than the others.

At some distance from shore, Mr. Miller pointed out to Henry something black in the water, but, before he had time to look, it was gone. In about a minute's time, the head and long neck of a bird suddenly showed themselves, turned from side to side with a quick jerk, and disappeared again. "That is a cormorant," said Mr. Miller; "a bird who, at this season, has a much better chance of catching fish than a gull, for he can not only swim but dive, and stay under water for a very long time. A little does not satisfy him, but when he *has* had enough,

he flies along close to the water, until he has



CORMORANT.

found a safe rock, where he spreads his

wings to dry in the sun or wind, and then goes a fishing again.”

Henry recollected having been once told not to eat like a cormorant; and though he did not then know what a cormorant was, he now began to suspect that boys got that name when they ate so much bread-and-butter that they were fit for nothing afterwards, but to lie basking in the sun.

He had heard that sea-water was salt, but had never had an opportunity of knowing it for himself; so when his papa told him to put into his mouth a wet pebble, which he had just picked up, he soon spat it out, making a very wry face.

“Where does all the salt come from which gives a taste to so much water?” was a natural question, but not a very easy one to answer.

Mr. Miller, however, said that a great quantity of salt was washed into the sea by

rivers, and that though the water was drawn up by the sun, in the form of vapour, the salt was not. Besides this, it is supposed that there are, in the bottom of the sea, large rocks of salt, which are constantly being dissolved by the water, and give it its bitter taste.

Not many days after, when Henry wanted to know how salt was made, Mr. Miller reminded him of sea-water, and told him that, in some parts of England, during summer, salt-water was allowed to flow into shallow pits, from which the heat of the sun drew up the water in vapour, leaving the salt behind. This, he said, was scraped up and purified. In some inland countries, such as Poland, salt is dug out of mines. A great deal of the salt which we use is got from salt springs, a long way from the sea, which, it is supposed, flow through or over rocks of salt under ground.

A man now passed by, having something in his hand, which he showed to Mr. Miller, and asked him if it was coral.

“No,” said Mr. Miller, “it is not coral, but a kind of sponge, which has been torn by the late storm from the rock on which it grew.”

Henry looked about very carefully, in the hope of finding a piece which he might wash himself with, when he went home; but though he was told that it was not likely that he would find the right sort, which is brought from the Mediterranean Sea, he did not give over his search.

He did not succeed, but presently came to his papa bringing something, which, he had made up his mind, must be a sea-beetle.

It was about as large as his hand, nearly square; black, shining, and leathery, and from each corner stuck out a long, black horn. Two of these horns were hooked at

the end, and two were straight. When he pressed it, he found that it was hollow; but

as soon as he took off his fingers it recovered its shape again, being as elastic as an india-rubber ball.



PURSE OF SKATE.

“This,” said Mr. Miller, “is not a beetle, but an egg.”

Henry had seen thrushes’ eggs, and eaten hens’ eggs, but they were so unlike this black leather bag that he thought his papa must be joking.

“Not the egg of a bird, but of a fish.

As we came through the market to-day,

I showed you some flat and very ugly fishes, with eyes and mouth something like those of a human being, and with a long tail like that of a quadruped.”

Henry remembered to have seen them, and that they were called skates. “And is this the egg of a skate?”

Not exactly the egg, but the egg-shell. There was once a yelk in it, something like that in a hen’s egg. Out of this yelk a young skate grew, and when it was large enough it forced its way out through this end.

Mr. Miller pinched one end of the egg-shell, or purse, as it is called, between his finger and thumb, holding it as one would a letter which one wanted to read without breaking the seal, and the end of the purse opened.

“And did it float about in the water while the young fish was growing, or was it laid on the beach?”

“Neither: if it had been left to float about in the water, it would soon have been eaten by gulls, or driven ashore; and how can fishes lay their eggs on the land? No, it was left by the fish among the weed which grows at the bottom of the sea, and the hooked horns held on by the stem of one of them, until the fish had escaped. The late storm, I suppose, tore it away from the weeds and washed it ashore. I have found them with a yelk in them, but this rarely happens.”

“But, papa, you said that there were weeds in the sea; are they like the weeds in gardens?”

Mr. Miller pointed to the rocks, some of which were covered with long bunches of tangled stems of a dark-brown or green colour, which he said were sea-weeds. Some stout stems were also lying about the shore, like horse-whips, with a bunch of roots at

one end, and a tuft of leathery straps at the other. This, too, was a sea-weed. He re-



SEA-WEED.

minded him, too, of a book which he had seen at home, filled with crimson, purple,



SEA-TANGLE.

green, and brown leaves, which he said were also sea-weeds. They do not send their

roots into the ground like garden weeds, but cling to the rocks or to each other, and are nourished by the water in which they grow.

The purse of the skate was secured, to be carried home as a prize, and a stem of a large sea-weed was soon made into a whip.

The next curious thing picked up was a piece of stone, so full of holes as to resemble a piece of honeycomb, except that the holes were round and not regularly placed.

“This,” said Mr. Miller, “is a piece of limestone, which once formed a part of one of the rocks jutting into the sea. The holes were made by shell-fish, but whether made for shelter, or because the animals within feed on the lime, I cannot say. It is very clear that this piece has been washing about for a very long time, as it is worn smooth by being battered against other stones. We must call these shell-fish both useful and mischievous animals. Here they are cer-

tainly useful, for they eat away parts of the rock until they are not able to bear the force of the waves, when they break away



PHOLAS.

and are driven on to the beach. I dare say that a great many years ago the rocks about this place were much higher than they are now, and were in the way of boats

sailing to and fro. But when the little animals choose to make their houses in quays or sea-walls, they do much mischief by eating away the foundations.

“ I once came here when the water was low, and as I stepped from rock to rock I broke off several pieces with my foot. The animals were then in them and alive. They are about the size and shape of a horse-bean; they have, like oysters, two shells, which are rough, and of a dull yellow colour. There is another kind of shell-fish, larger than this, which burrows in rocks, named pholas.”

This was the last curiosity picked up to-day; but before they left the shore, Mr. Miller went to a cave, in which he recollected to have seen, a long time before, some plants of sea-fern growing on the roof. They were too high to be reached; but as he was a great admirer of ferns, and this kind grew only on the sea-shore, he did not like to

miss a chance of seeing them again. To his great joy, the late storm, which had done so much damage to the shipping, had washed away one of the sides of the cave, and a large mass of stone had fallen just beneath the very place where the ferns grew. He mounted on this, and with the help of a knife, loosened some small stones around the roots of the ferns, and so took out some fine plants, roots and all. What was done with these you shall hear by and by.

The next day was rainy, but on the day following the sun shone brightly, and there was every prospect of some fine weather. "The tide does not suit well," said Mr. Miller, "but as we may not have a chance of another day's sunshine, I will hire a carriage, and we will go to a beautiful part of the coast, which is some miles distant, where you will be able to pick up shells, and have a much wider view of the sea than

that which we saw the day before yesterday. Accordingly, a basket of provisions was packed up, and the carriage was very soon rolling merrily along.

On the way, Henry asked his papa what he meant by saying that "the tide did not suit."

Mr. Miller explained to him that the water of the sea was not stagnant like that of a pond or a lake, nor did it always run one way like that of a river, but flowed in one direction for a little more than six hours, and in another during about the same time. "This motion of the water," he said, "is called a tide. When the water is flowing towards the shore, the tide is said to be 'coming in.' All this time it is rising on the beach, and when it ceases to come in, we say that 'it is high water.' Soon after high water it begins to go out again, or ebb, and when it ceases to ebb we call it 'low

water.' Now at the place where we are going, the shore is not made up of little pebbly beaches separated from each other by rocks jutting out, but long flat sands stretch for several miles. They are very pleasant to walk on when the tide is out, but it will be high water to-day just at the time when we reach the coast, so that I am afraid we shall not be able to have a very long walk on the sands, unless we wait some time. Never mind! we shall at least have a glorious view of the sea."

It was past twelve o'clock, when, after mounting a steep hill, the driver was told to stop, and to be in waiting at the same place exactly at four.

The basket was taken out; and Mr. Miller and Henry, passing through a gate, found themselves in a large sloping field, partly covered by furze-bushes, and seeming to stretch downwards till it quite touched the

sea. There were no high lands here on either side shutting in the view; nothing but a wide, wide waste of blue water, sparkling in the sunshine, and, where it touched the land, breaking into a wide edge of foam. The noise was incessant, sounding something like the rumbling of many carriages at a distance, now rising, and now falling, like the wind during a storm, and every now and then mixed with the thundering roar of some larger wave than usual as it rushed up the sands, or dashed against a rock.

Henry, in great delight, set off at full speed down the field, expecting to reach the shore at once; but his race was soon ended, for he shortly found himself at the brink of a high cliff or precipice, the face of which was almost as steep as a wall. A narrow winding path was soon discovered cut through the rock, by the help of which they climbed down, and at last stood on the

shore. The wind was blowing very freshly above, but here it was quite calm and mild. One might have thought the season to be spring, or even summer, for all signs of winter, such as mud, bare trees, and stunted grass, were left behind.

Close to the base of the cliff there were large stones which had fallen from above; but a few yards out there was nothing but fine sand, so dry and firm that, though the foot left a mark whereon it rested, and kicked up a little piece of sand whenever it was lifted, no walking could be more pleasant.

But it was not this which was noticed at first. The great sight was the enormous waves, which seemed to grow up out of the water a long way out, to rise higher and higher, and to rush on faster and faster, till, in their haste to reach the land, they fell forward, and, dashing into a sheet of foam, swept far up on the sand; then, growing

weaker and weaker, they made one last sweep, and drew back as if afraid, but were driven on again by the new waves, which had formed themselves meanwhile.

Mr. Miller said that about every ninth wave was larger than the rest. Henry and he counted together; and though the eighth or tenth was sometimes the largest, they accounted for the mistake by supposing that they must either have missed one, or reckoned the same wave twice.

Many times, as a wave went back, they chased it as far as they could go without wetting their feet. The sand seemed to grow dry and hard the instant that the water left it, so that they could follow it very closely; but soon another great wave came roaring in, and they were obliged to scamper towards land as fast as their legs would carry them.

Once, while Henry was looking one way

and running the other, he came against the front of a little rock which rose through the sand, and narrowly escaped a good ducking. Another time he stood on the top of a little rock which rose like an island through the sand, hoping that the water would surround him. For several minutes he waited very patiently, but the waves always stopped before they reached him. At last, just as he had grown tired, there came a ninth wave, which not only surrounded him, but rose so high as to dash against his legs. Whether he was frightened, or the water was too strong for him to stand against, I do not know, but he sprang off and ran towards the land, wet nearly up to his knees.

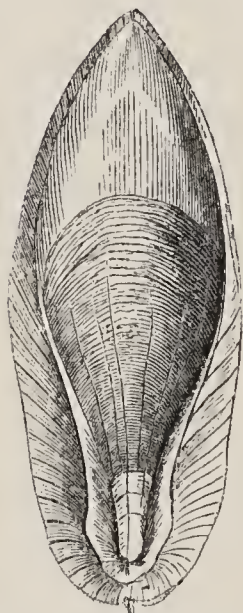
It was now high water; and as Henry belonged to that class of boys who like fresh air, exercise, and bread-and-butter, he gladly heard the proposal to find a good place where they might sit down to dinner. They

had not to go far. Not a hundred yards off, a small stream came tumbling over the cliff among some large stones, and, after flowing for a short distance, sank into the sand before it reached the sea. Towards this they made their way, frequently picking up shells and other things which had been washed in by the waves, but throwing them all away again, because the basket in which they were to be stowed away had yet to be emptied.

A large stone, with a towel spread on it, was the table, and stones served as seats. The dinner consisted of some slices of cold tongue, and a hunch of bread. The stream supplied plenty of clear and cold water, and this was the only part of the feast of which much was left.

“And now,” said Mr. Miller, “that we have made room in our basket, let us search for curiosities.”

High up on the sands, and close to the late dining-room, lay a number of white, flat substances, which puzzled Henry as much as the purse of the skate had done. They were



SHELL OF CUTTLE-FISH.

oval in shape, and about the size of his foot. One side was hard and rough, the other smoother, and soft enough to be scratched by the finger-nail. Whether they were bones or shells he could not tell. "This," said Mr. Miller, "is the backbone of a cuttle-fish. The animal, when alive, is soft,

and nearly transparent. It has a large head, on which there are a number of long arms stretching out. It lives on small fish, which it chases, and then catches hold of by the help of many small suckers on its arms.

When chased itself, it spurts out a quantity of black fluid, like ink, making the water so thick and dark that its enemy loses sight of



CUTTLE-FISH AND EGGS.

it, and is obliged to give up the chase. Often, when I have been fishing from a boat, a cuttle-fish has followed a fish which

I have caught, up to the very surface of the water, and sometimes I have caught the cuttle-fish itself, by darting into it a hook fastened to the end of a stick.

“I was once fishing, when the man in the boat with me caught a cuttle-fish in this way, and having lifted it into the boat too soon, it spurted its ink with such force as to spatter us all over. It is not used as food in this country, but it makes excellent bait.”

Scattered along the coast were a number of scarlet berries, which Mr. Miller looked at very closely, and said they were cranberries.

“But do cranberries grow on sea-weeds?” said Henry.

“No,” replied Mr. Miller, “certainly not; and I can only account for their being here by supposing that some ship from America must have been lost at sea during the late gale, and that these berries must have formed part of her cargo. You remember

how dreadfully we heard the wind howling on Christmas Eve. It was a sad Christmas to many a poor sailor, who hoped, perhaps, to spend it among his friends on shore; friends, alas! whom he will now never meet again. See, here is something else which must have come from a ship."

This was a small lump of spermaceti, a substance which is obtained from a kind of whale found in the Arctic regions. It had neither taste nor smell, and looked exactly like a piece of camphor.

"Look!" said Henry, as he picked up something; "here is a curious piece of wood full of holes, like the stone which we found the other day."

"This," said Mr. Miller, "is a piece of wood, which was once, perhaps, part of a ship that has been wrecked; at all events, it has been a long time in the water. The holes were made by a kind of worm, called

Teredo, which eats its way into the hardest timber, making it so weak that a slight blow will crush it.

In some seas the Teredo is so abundant, that no vessel is safe unless its bottom is entirely coated with copper. The worm is very small when first it gets into the wood, but grows larger as it eats its way, making a passage through the whole length of a plank, but never coming to the surface; so that a beam of timber may appear to be solid, and yet



TEREDO.

all the while be within as full of holes as a sponge. As it goes on, it lines its passage with a white shell, which it has the power of making." In one of the holes a portion of the white shell was still remaining.

"Is it not," continued Mr. Miller, "a wonderful little animal? It can work its way in the dark, through solid wood, taking care never to turn a quarter of an inch too much towards the right or towards the left. It is taught by God to line its house with shell, but no one knows how it works, or what materials it employs; and, worm as it is, the boldest sailor would refuse to go to sea in a ship which it had taken hold of. It may lead us, too, to despise nothing that God has made, however trifling it may appear."

The next thing picked up was a piece of cork, covered with barnacles. Barnacles are small shell-fish, growing on long leathery stems, by which they fasten themselves to

floating wood, or the bottoms of vessels. They are not so mischievous as the worms



BARNACLES.

mentioned before, as they do not actually eat the wood; but when, as is sometimes

the case, they thickly cover the bottom of a ship, they prevent it from going quickly through the water. It is sometimes found necessary to take a ship into a dock, in order to scrape off the barnacles.

A piece of stone picked up by Henry, looking like a coal-cinder, but white, Mr. Miller said was pumice-stone. It is one of the kinds of stone thrown up by volcanoes, or burning mountains. It is so light that it floats on water. He thought that this piece might, perhaps, have been thrown from a burning mountain into the sea, or that it might have been thrown overboard from a ship. It is used on board ships to scrub the decks with, and on land painters use it in scraping off paint from wood which is to be coated afresh.

“On the whole,” said he, “most probably it came direct from a volcano, for I scarcely ever came to this part of the coast without

finding some, and it could scarcely happen that pumice-stone would always be falling overboard by accident.

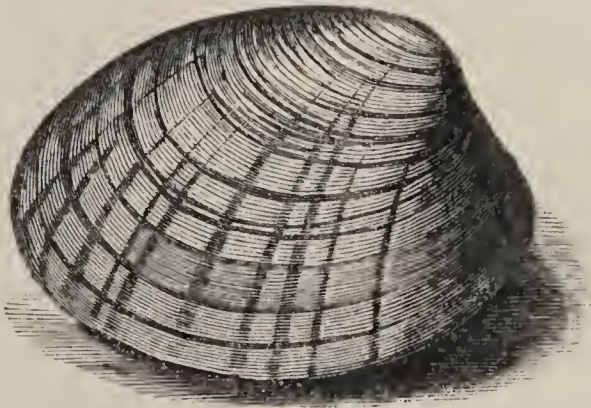
The number of shells which lay scattered along the beach was very great. Some were like snail-shells, but more solid. Mr. Miller



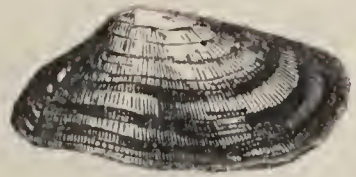
WHELK.

knew the names, but as he thought that Henry would not be able to recollect them, he only told him that they crawled about rocks and sea-weeds, very much as snails do on land, some living on sea-weed, and others

on dead fish, or any animal substance they can find. Those which are named periwinkles and whelks are gathered by people who live near the sea, and sold for food, but they are neither nice nor wholesome. Others were what Mr. Miller called bivalves; that is, each animal had two shells, fastened



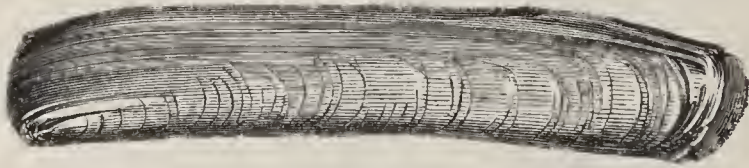
VENUS CHIONE.



DONAX.

together by a hinge. There were a great many large white cockle-shells, deeply furrowed, and having rows of sharp points on the outside. Some were yet larger, brown outside and white within, and strong enough

to scoop up sand with; others, which were flatter, were scarcely thicker than paper. Most of these were single, and had no fish in them; but many smaller kinds were found which had been washed in without injury. These were stowed away very carefully. The most singular of all was a white one, four or five inches long, shaped something like the pod of a pea, but open at both



RAZOR-SHELL.

ends. This Mr. Miller called a razor-shell, and said that the animal lived in the sand, burrowing in it like an earth-worm, and, perhaps, living on the small sea-insects which it finds.

Yet more curious than any of the bivalves, was a fish shaped like the axle and spokes

of a wheel. It was dead; but Mr. Miller said that each of its five arms was covered with holes, through which, when the animal was alive, it sent out small suckers, and with them caught hold of its food. Fishermen often find these star-fishes, as they are called, very troublesome, as they are very abundant in some places, and eat the bait intended for crabs and lobsters.

Henry had now found so many strange things, which turned out to be quite different from what he expected; that when he picked up what looked like a wax-candle, he thought he held in his hand some very wonderful sea-monster. But a wax-candle it really was, and had been a long time in the sea, as there were young barnacles attached to one end of it. This, like the cranberries, no doubt came from a wreck, and was carefully stored away in the basket, though one could not look at it without sad thoughts.

They had now walked nearly to the end of the long sands, and Mr. Miller wished to pass round a rocky point, in order to see what it was that drew together a large flock of gulls beyond, some of which were flying round in circles, now and then dipping into the water, some swimming, and some perched on the dark rocks.

The tide had gone down a good deal, but had not left the rock. Mr. Miller managed to climb round, and told Henry to wait for him, as this work required longer and stronger arms than his. He soon came back; and, after waiting a little while longer, the tide went out so far that, watching for an opportunity, when a great wave went out, they were able to run round the point before another came in.

The gulls all rose and flew away as they drew near, but they found, on the spot where they had been gamboling, an immense

number of shells, with the fish still in them, and had little doubt that the quick eyes of the gulls had discovered these, and that they had been making a plentiful feast.

They had now reached another winding path, by which the people who live near the coast were in the habit of driving mules and donkeys laden with sea-weed, to be used as manure. After a storm, in summer and autumn, the coast has a very busy appearance, from the number of people who gain their living in this way. The weed is first collected into heaps on the sand, then carried to the top of the cliff, where it is thrown into a large heap, and allowed to stay until it rots, after which it is spread on the fields, and is a very useful manure.

Four o'clock having now nearly arrived, they said good-bye to the sea, with its blue waves, its yellow sands, its shells, its pebbles,

and its many strange things, and found the carriage waiting for them.

In a few days Henry was at home again ; but as you may like to know what he did with his treasures, I will tell you. Some were placed in his little museum, or collection of curiosities. The larger shells and pebbles, together with some pieces of spar, which were brought, another day, from a limestone quarry, were applied to a different purpose.

A round zinc saucer was procured, about fourteen inches across, and three deep. About six or eight holes were bored in the bottom with a gimlet, and a number of pieces of broken tiles and flower-pots were placed in it, with a small pot turned upside down in the middle. Over the potsherds was placed a layer of moss, and the saucer was filled up with earth. Round the pot in the middle, the shells and stones were built

up to the height of six or eight inches, and the ferns planted in some more earth between. The whole was well watered, and then covered with a large glass dome. A prettier little rockery you never saw. Its only fault is that, when once made, it scarcely ever requires anything to be done to it. You cannot give it too much water, for what it does not want drains away through the holes in the bottom, and the earth is not washed away with it, for the moss stops it. And you can scarcely make a mistake in giving it too little water, for, as long as it is covered with a glass, the water, which rises in vapour, strikes against the dome, and trickles down again into the saucer. Henry has not yet watered it once since the day it was made, but he will do so as soon as he sees it beginning to look dry, for ferns grow best in a moist soil and damp air.

And now I have reached the end of my

story. There is little in it but an account of what Henry and his father saw in the course of a few hours, on the sea-shore. You too, if you like, may pick up shells and pebbles, and see in them some of the wondrous works of God's creation. If you do not live near the sea, look for curious things by the river's side, in the woods, or in the hedges. They are everywhere, all differing one from another, but alike leading us to admire the wisdom and goodness of God.

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